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## ABSTRACT

A study is reported that describes ways in which nonnative speakers assess, plan, and execute speech acts in certain situations. The subjects, 15 advanced English foreign-language learners, were given 6 speech act situations (two apologies, two complaints, and two requests) in which they were to role play along with a native speaker. The interactions were videotaped and after each set of two situations of the same type, the videotape was played back and then the respondents were asked both fixed and probing questions regarding the factors contributing to the production of their responses in those situations. The retrospective verbal report protocols were analyzed with regard to processing strategies in speech act formulation. The study found that in executing speech act behavior, half of the time respondents conducted only a general assessment of the utterances called for in the situation, often thought in two languages and sometimes in three languages when planning and executing speech act utterances, utilized a series of different strategies in searching for language forms, and did not attend much to grammar or pronunciation. Appended are: (1) the background questionnaire; (2) responses in English to different role-play situations; and (3) a retrospective verbal report interview. Contains 27 references. (Author/LB)

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## **THE PRODUCTION OF SPEECH ACTS BY EFL LEARNERS<sup>1</sup>**

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## ABSTRACT

Descriptions are now available as to the speech act realizations of natives speakers in given situations and as to expected deviations from these patterns in the speech of nonnatives. What is still largely lacking is a description of the processes involved in the production of these speech act utterances. This paper reports on a study describing ways in which nonnative speakers assess, plan, and execute such utterances. The subjects, fifteen advanced English foreign-language learners, were given six speech act situations (two apologies, two complaints, and two requests) in which they were to role play along with a native speaker.

The interactions were videotaped and after each set of two situations of the same type, the videotape was played back and then the respondents were asked both fixed and probing questions regarding the factors contributing to the production of their responses in those situations. The retrospective verbal report protocols were analyzed with regard to processing strategies in speech act formulation. The study found that in executing speech act behavior, half of the time respondents conducted only a general assessment of the utterances called for in the situation, often thought in two languages and sometimes in three languages when planning and executing speech act utterances, utilized a series of different strategies in searching for language forms, and did not attend much to grammar nor to pronunciation.

During the last decade, empirical data on speech acts as performed in native and nonnative languages has been accumulating. For example, a considerable amount of research data has been collected regarding apologies, requests, complaints, and other speech acts (e.g., Wolfson 1989; Blum-Kulka, House-Edmondson, & Kasper 1989; Olshtain & Cohen 1983, 1989, 1990; Cohen & Olshtain 1985; Cohen, Olshtain, & Rosenstein 1986). At this point in time, information generated about speech acts constitutes an important contribution to the field of applied linguistics as it relates to language learning and teaching.

The first speech act study that the current researchers undertook was actually motivated by a desire to determine whether it was possible to test for the ability to produce speech acts effectively (Cohen & Olshtain 1981). At present, there are reasonably accurate descriptions available as to the speech act realizations expected of natives in given situations. There is also some idea as to the extent to which nonnatives at varying proficiency levels will approximate native norms and as to ways in which they will deviate from these norms. What are still lacking are detailed descriptions of the processes involved in the production of these speech act utterances by nonnatives, whether in a formal elicitation situation as in a test or in a more informal situation. The very complexity of the speech act set has made it an area of interest in language learning--as this complexity makes special demands of the speaker. The step-by-step manner in which nonnative speakers meet these demands has just started to be documented.

It is noteworthy that little investigation of the processes involved in the production of utterances by nonnatives has been undertaken. Seliger (1980) classified nonnatives as pertaining to one of two general patterns -- the planners and the correctors, with the former planning out their utterance before delivering it while the latter start talking and make mid-course corrections. Such descriptions however attractive are still at a high level of generalization, and do not deal with specific strategy behavior. More recent references to utterance production strategies have generally put the emphasis on the development of theory (e.g., Faerch & Kasper 1983), with only limited work in describing production strategies based on introspective or retrospective verbal report Pculisse (1989).

While early reference to strategic competence as a component of nonnative-speaker communicative language use (Canale & Swain 1980) put the emphasis on "compensatory" strategies--that is, strategies used to compensate or remediate for a lack in some language area, Bachman provides a broader theoretical model for viewing strategic competence, based on work in cognitive psychology (Bachman 1990:100). Bachman proposes an assessment component whereby the speaker sets communicative goals, a planning component whereby the speaker retrieves the relevant items from language competence and plans their use, and an execution component whereby the speaker implements the plan.

Thus, in theory, when individuals are given a situation in which to perform an oral role play, they may first assess the situation and identify the information that is needed in that context. This assessment phase actually constitutes a form of

preplanning. Then, they may plan out their response and go about retrieving from their language competence the grammatical, discourse, and sociocultural features needed for the role play. Finally, they execute the role play. After they finish, they may again perform an assessment to evaluate the extent to which the communicative goal was achieved.

As is the case with any theoretical model, subjects may make differential use of the components of this model when performing specific tasks. For example, there are respondents who might not assess the situation before starting the role play and because of this, may violate certain sociocultural conventions. Likewise, there are respondents who plan out their foreign-language utterances in detailed fashion before producing them, while others just start talking on an online basis, and then perhaps do some planning along the way. In any event, speakers may well not proceed through the stages in a linear fashion.

Perhaps the first study of speech act production strategies using verbal report was conducted by a graduate student in Brazil under Cohen's supervision (Motti 1987). In that study, which involved ten intermediate EFL university students, the respondents provided verbal report data just after performing apology speech acts. They indicated that 40% of their speech acts reflected previously learned or internalized structures and that mostly these structures were produced "automatically."

What was interesting was how many things they indicated having on their minds while responding. For example, they reported analyzing the situation, which included noting the interlocutor's age and status. They also reported thinking the

utterance through quickly in Portuguese native language and then coming back to English, the foreign language. Subjects said that they worried about whether they were producing their utterances correctly in terms of the choice of vocabulary and grammar. There was also some concern expressed by subjects as to whether they pronounced their English utterances correctly (Motti 1987).

One recent study of speech act production using verbal report (Robinson 1991) had twelve Japanese ESL students complete a discourse questionnaire with six refusal situations to which they were to respond in writing (without rejoinders from the interlocutor as in the Discourse Completion Test; see Blum-Kulka 1982). The respondents were also requested to provide think-aloud data which was tape-recorded as they completed the situations. Although they were invited to think aloud in Japanese, they all did so in English, most likely because the investigator knew no Japanese. After they had completed their responses along with the think aloud data, the investigator interviewed the respondents regarding the content of their utterances from the think aloud session, playing back the tape-recording to remind subjects of specific thoughts.

Whereas one interest was in obtaining cognitive data on linguistic processing, the researcher did not obtain much data of this nature. Rather, the data dealt with cultural and personality issues. For example, respondents sometimes accepted the request rather than refusing it as they were instructed to do because their cultural background taught Japanese girls to say "yes," or at least not to say "no." There were also specific instances in which the respondents indicated in the retrospective



interview that they did not have experience with the situation (Robinson 1991).

The current study set out to investigate more fully the processes whereby nonnative speakers produce speech acts in an elicited role-play situation, and then to relate these processes to the products. The study was designed so as to arrive at a description of the ways in which nonnative speakers assess, plan, and execute such utterances. A second interest was in exploring the sources for positive and negative transfer of forms from native to target language by attempting to describe just when the thinking was taking place in one or the other language. Whereas the literature on language transfer pays a good deal of attention to the transfer of structures (e.g., Gass & Selinker 1983, Ringbom 1987, Dechert & Raupach 1989), little attention has been paid to the shift in language of thought between and among languages (in the case of trilinguals) during the process of assessing, planning, or executing a given utterance.

Another purpose of the study was to examine ways that verbal report could be used as a research methodology for collecting thought processes during oral elicitation situations.<sup>2</sup> The ultimate aim of the study was to yield insights for less successful nonnative speakers as to how to produce speech acts more effectively. Such insights may well be deemed useful in preparing learners for oral elicitation situations in which their communicative language abilities are being assessed.

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<sup>2</sup> See Cohen (1991) for an update on the pros and cons of using verbal report in research, Bachman (1990:335) for an endorsement of the technique, and Anderson, Bachman, Perkins, and Cohen (1991) for an example of its use in the convergent validation of a test of reading comprehension.



The following are the research questions that were asked:

- (1) To what extent do respondents assess and plan their utterances and what is the nature of this assessment and planning?
- (2) What is the language of thought used in planning and in executing utterances? To what extent do respondents try to "think like natives"?
- (3) What are the processes involved in the search, retrieval, and selection of language forms?
- (4) What is the extent of attention to grammar and pronunciation in the production of speech act utterances?

#### The Design of the Study

The subjects were fifteen advanced English foreign-language learners, eleven native speakers of Hebrew (Jackie, Sharon, Shalom, Zohara, Hagar, Nogah, Yaakov, Shlomit, Hava, Galit, and Ricki) and four near-native speakers, who were native speakers of French (Michel), Portuguese (Lillian), Spanish (Lily), and Arabic (Wassim) respectively. Ten were females, five males, and their average age was twenty-four. They were undergraduates in the humanities or social sciences, and were all taking a course in reading English for academic purposes at the time of the study.

The subjects were asked to fill out a short background questionnaire (re the languages used in the home, self-evaluation of English, time in an English-speaking country, and past and current uses for English; see Appendix A) and then were given six

speech act situations (two apologies, two complaints, and two requests) in which they were to role play along with a native speaker (see Appendix B). These situations were written out for the respondents on cards and the native English-speaking interlocutor, Debbie, also read the instructions out loud just before each situation was role-played. The interactions were videotaped, and after each set of two situations of the same type, the tape was played back and the respondents were asked in Hebrew by a native Hebrew-speaking investigator both fixed and probing questions regarding the factors contributing to the production of their response to that situation (see Appendix C).

These retrospective verbal report protocols were analyzed with regard to the following aspects: the extent to which utterances were assessed and planned, the selection of language of thought for planning and executing the utterances, the search/retrieval/selection of language forms, the extent to which grammar and pronunciation were attended to, and the sources for language used in the production of the utterances (see Appendix B for the transcript of the interactions between one respondent, Nogah, and the interlocutor). The independent variables in the study were the speech act situation, the speakers' language and that of their parents, speakers' length of stay in English-speaking countries, and the extent of the speakers' English language use.

### Results

Let us now report on the findings for the research questions enumerated above:

### 1. The assessment and planning of utterances

It was found that in 49% of the speech act situations, respondents reported that they made an assessment of the general direction that the utterance would go in, but did not plan the specific utterances that they would use. In 30% of the cases they actually planned out a portion of the utterances, perhaps just several words. In the remaining 21% of the situations, they did not plan at all (see Table 1). As can be seen in Table 1, the situation of asking for a lift prompted by far the most specific planning. Respondents reported perceiving that since they were asking a higher status person for a ride, they needed to think about it more first.

While relating the report of assessment and/or planning of utterances to successful execution of the speech acts is beyond the scope of this study, it might be expected that those doing more assessment and planning performed better. There is a growing literature which suggests that the use of metacognitive strategies has a beneficial effect on language learning and language use (O'Malley & Chamot 1990).

### 2. The language of thought

The language of thought for planning<sup>3</sup> and for executing the utterance turned out to be a complex matter. The three most common patterns were planning in English and responding in English (21 instances across 9 speakers), planning in Hebrew and translating from Hebrew to English in the response (17 instances across 7 speakers), and planning in Hebrew with the response in

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<sup>3</sup>In this instance, "planning" implies either general assessment of the situation, specific planning, or both.

English (16 instances across 8 speakers). On theoretical grounds, we might expect that planning and executing utterances exclusively in English would produce the least amount of negative transfer from the native language, that planning utterances in Hebrew and executing them in English would produce more negative transfer, and that planning in Hebrew with execution consisting of translation of Hebrew to English would produce the most negative transfer.

The other sixteen combinations of thought patterns had far fewer instances--for example, planning in English and responding both in English directly and through translation from Hebrew to English (5 instances, 4 speakers), and planning in Hebrew and responding in English directly and through translation from Hebrew to English (4 instances, 2 speakers). The fourteen other combinations included six which pertained to the non-Hebrew speakers.

Whereas the French, Portuguese, and Arabic speakers tended to think in Hebrew rather than in their native language, they thought in their native language in one or two situations: the French speaker (Michel) for planning and producing his utterance in the "lift" situation, the Portuguese speaker (Lillian) for planning in the "book" and "notes" situations, and the Arabic speaker (Wassim) for planning in the "notes" situation. In the case of the Spanish speaker, Lily, whose English was weak, the patterns were most complex, involving both planning in Hebrew and then back to Spanish and translating from Spanish to English in producing the utterance for the "meeting" situation; planning in

Spanish and then in Hebrew, with the response translated from Hebrew to English in the "book" situation; and planning in both Hebrew and Spanish simultaneously, with the response translated both from Hebrew and Spanish to English in the "music" situation.

Only one speaker (Jackie) used the same thought pattern throughout, a native Hebrew speaker, who planned his utterances in Hebrew and responded by translating from Hebrew to English. Speakers were found to be influenced by the situation in the way that they thought, but situations effected speakers differentially, apparently due to the closeness of the situation to them personally. For example, certain respondents would indicate that they had just been in a given situation the previous day, while others indicated that they had never been in that situation in their lives and so their response needed more careful planning. In only one situation did a particular thought pattern prevail across different respondents: in the "music" situation, six speakers out of the fifteen reported planning their utterance and responding in English. It would appear that this sort of complaint situation encouraged processing of the language directly in English, at least according to the retrospective verbal reports. This finding might have importance for researchers in their selection of situations for role playing.

With respect to whether the respondents tried to "think like natives," five speakers reported behaving like this at least twice (Zohara, Nogah, Lily, Yaakov, & Shlomit) and one reported thinking this way once (Wassim). This constituted only 12

instances out of 90 or 13%. Three of them had had extended time in an English speaking country (Zohara, Nogah, and Shlomit) and three had little or none, so this factor did not seem to be overriding in their reporting that they had tried to think natively. However, of the three who had not been in English-speaking environments, two were speakers of other languages (Lily: Spanish, Wassim: Arabic) so perhaps this factor played a role for them in encouraging them to think like natives.

### 3. The search, retrieval and selection of language forms

In this section we will take a look at the actual problems that speakers had in searching for, retrieving, or selecting language forms to use in their speech act utterances.

a. Difficulty of speech acts: After completing the two apology situations, Hagar commented that "to apologize and also to have to do it in English--that's twice as difficult." Hence, she was calling attention to the fact that she was not only being asked to perform in English, but to have to do it with complex speech behaviors as well.

b. Retrieval process -- "din in the head": Ricki noted after completing the first two situations that she had difficulty in speaking English because of a long period of non-use: "When I start speaking English after not speaking it for a long time, my vocabulary is weak and it is hard to retrieve words from memory." Krashen (1985:40-41) has called attention to the "din in the head" phenomenon whereby the "din," or sense of having the language available for use, may take anywhere from one to two



hours of good input and may wear off after a few days. In certain oral elicitation tasks there may be a warm-up period, but often this period is not long enough to activate the din in the head.

c. Self-debate before selection: In the "lift" situation, Hava debated between "to get a ride" and "to give a lift," and finally asked whether she "could get a lift." Shalom debated among "drive," "come," and "go," and ended up with, "Can I come with you?" Galit wanted to make a polite request and was uncertain as to whether she could ask, "Do you have any room in the car?" As she put it: "It has a lot of meanings and I wasn't sure that it was correct, so I changed my tactic, and decided she would understand better if I said, 'I want to drive with you.' I thought of 'lift,' but didn't know how to use it in a sentence so I left it out." In the same situation, Lily debated among three expressions, "in the same neighborhood/your same neighborhood/in your neighborhood." She was translating from Spanish and felt that the result was not good. Also with regard to the "lift" situation, Yaakov debated how to address Debbie--"Debbie," "Teacher," "Gveret 'lady,'" or "Gveret Teacher." He decided to address her the way he would in a high school class in Israel.

d. Afterthoughts: In the "meeting" situation, Ricki used "very" as the intensifier in her expression of apology, "very sorry," but thought to herself afterwards that she could have said "terribly sorry." She also used "stopped" in that situation ("I'm very sorry, but I--I met some friends and they stopped me and I couldn't go on...") and, as she put it, "I knew it wasn't the correct word but I was already in the middle of things."

Sometimes the afterthoughts a respondent has during a given speaking task can, in fact, cause later communicative failure in that their mind is still engaged in some previous language form while they are being called upon to perform a new task.

e. Awareness of using the monitor: With regard to the "meeting" situation, Lily commented, "I always think about grammar and so my pace is so slow. I think about how to structure the sentence correctly, verb tenses and other aspects. E.g.: 'I haven't sleep good' -> 'I didn't sleep good.' I thought the first form wasn't correct." In the "music" situation, the same speaker erroneously said, "you have listened to the music very loud last night" and noted, "With this confusion, I wondered whether to continue with the mistake or correct myself. I decided that it was important to correct myself because if I am aware of an error and it is possible to correct it, I want to do it." Ricki could also be viewed as a consistent monitor user. With respect to the "music" situation, she commented, "I am always thinking about grammar...When I have problems like 'not/don't,' I correct them. 'I was yesterday awake--' just came out that way and I noted that it was not correct."

Hagar on the other hand would be viewed as an underuser of the monitor. With regard to the same situation, she remarked, "I don't effort at grammar. I am aware that it is bad. I focus on the idea, the message. Grammar gets me stuck. I prefer not to know how grammatical I sound. I depend on the listeners to see if they understand me, using facial expressions and letting them complete my sentences for me." Wassim only thought about grammar extensively in the "notes" situation in which it was not

spontaneous in that he was translating from Arabic. In the "meeting" and the "book" situations, he reported: "When I first read the situations, I thought that it would be good to think about my grammar, but I then forgot about it because it was more important for me that Debbie understand me."

f. Native-language transfer: In the "meeting" situation, Nogah wanted the English equivalent of the Hebrew *az ma*, meaning in this context, "OK, what should we do about it?" Instead, he produced the literal translation of the Hebrew, "So what?" which sounded rude. Likewise, in the "book" situation, Zohara chose to translate the Hebrew expression *ein li ma lahagid* which meant in this context, "I have no excuses." However, she translated it literally into "I have nothing to say," which she repeated three times, leaving the impression that she was unapologetic.

g. Use of a commonly-heard form: In the "lift" situation, Nogah used "I would love to--" in requesting a ride, which sounded peculiar for the requesting party to use:

Nogah: Excuse me, are you going to Baka?

Teacher: Yes, I am.

N: Really? Can I have a ride with you?

T: Yeah. Sure. Um--listen, I have to meet someone downstairs--um--I'll be leaving in about five minutes.

OK?

N: Fine, if it is OK with you. I will--I would love to.

T: Great--OK. I'll see you there.

N: Thank you.

T: You're welcome.

Nogah noted that she had heard this expression a lot and that is why it popped up in her utterance.

h. Omission, avoidance, or simplification: There were numerous examples of not saying what was intended for lack of the appropriate forms or lack of certainty about them.<sup>4</sup>

(1) omission - in the "meeting" situation, Lily thought of saying that she was late because of a problem at home, but decided that it would be too difficult for her to say it in English. Instead she chose to say that she usually comes late. She also indicated that in general she chooses the easiest utterance--the one for which she knows the verbs and the sentence structure, and can say it directly "without having to express it in a round-about way." In the "lift" situation, Shlomit debated whether she should address her teacher by name, and then chose instead to say, "Excuse me, are you going home?" because, as she put it, "it was a bit more formal--in general, when I address a lecturer in Hebrew, I do it this way."

(2) breakdown in the middle of a word or expression - in the "meeting" situation, Galit said, "I really don't have any exc-" and stopped there. She said she got stuck because of the x. In the "book" situation, Shalom asked, "Anything I can do to comp-- something?" She said that she sort of knew the word "compensate" receptively. In the "music" situation, Hagar started the utterance, "Can't you just--" and stopped. She felt that what she was starting to say was inappropriate and did not know how to convey the correct message in English. In the same

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<sup>4</sup>In instances where the speakers consciously chose these behaviors in their utterances, then they would be referred to as compensatory strategies.

situation, Lily produced, "I want you to--that--" and, in explanation, noted, "I wanted to say that I didn't want that to happen again but stopped in the middle because it was too complicated for me." In the "notes" situation, Nogah wanted to indicate that she always (*tamid* in Hebrew) gave her friend class notes if she wanted them, but did not know how to say it: "I debated between 'often' and 'always' and I couldn't remember it, so I let it go." She simply said, "When you need things I al--I give you" and made no further attempt to supply the adverb.

(3) partial delivery of a thought - in the "notes" situation, Hagar was not sure whether she should just continue requesting the notes or whether she should simply say that she did not need any favors from her friend and thank her anyway. She chose to be angry but commented that "anger doesn't come out well in English." As she put it, "I started and got stuck because of my English and so I chose a compromise." Her compromise was to be sarcastic: "Well, you're very kind to me. I mean I gave you in the past things and it's--uhm--alright, no thank you." In the same situation, Nogah wanted to use strong language but did not know how to say it in English in a way that would not sound too exaggerated, so instead of saying the English equivalent of *tov lada'at* 'it's good to know' or *ani ezkor et ze* 'I'll remember this,' she simply said, "I need them too."

(4) delivery of a different thought - in the "meeting" situation, Hava wanted to indicate that the bus did not come, but she reported that she did not find the word's in English, so instead she said, "I missed the bus." Galit, in looking for a

reason that she needed a ride, said, "My bus is very late," which she saw right away to be incorrect. As she explained it, "I meant that it wouldn't be leaving until later in the evening, but grammatically the sentence was OK so I left it. I let it go because it wasn't so bad--she would understand what I meant."

(5) lexical avoidance or simplification - in the "music" situation, Shlomit wanted to say that her neighbor's music was "too loud" but said, "Your music is--uhm--and I can't sleep with your music." In the "notes" situation, Yaakov produced the utterance, "I really don't like--this." He explained as follows: "I searched for something else like, 'the way you act/your behavior,' but it didn't come to mind when I was answering. I used the easiest way out at the moment."

(6) approximation - sometimes the word search ended in an approximation as the speaker felt or knew the word was incorrect but could not come up with an alternative. For example, in the "book" situation, Galit wanted to say the English equivalent of xomer 'material,' and could not find a word like "notebook," so she said "stuff": "I didn't find the--stuff." The same speaker, in the "music" situation, asked the neighbor to "reduce" the volume. Her retrospective comment was as follows: "I had my doubts about the word 'reduce'; it seemed like a literary word to me." When it was noted that the interlocutor (Debbie) had in fact supplied the phrase when she said, "I would have turned it down," Galit replied, "I was more into my own words than into listening to Debbie's." In the same situation, Jackie wanted to ask that the neighbor "turn it down," and



instead he got stuck with "put it lower." Again in the same situation, Jackie was looking for a word to indicate repair but did not find it. He said, "I'm shocked, I'm sorry," but he was looking for *lefatsot* 'to compensate' and, in his words, "had a blackout." Finally, in the "token" situation, Ricki said she used "Listen--" as an opener "because I didn't have anything else to use."

#### 4. Attention to grammar and pronunciation

Regarding the issue of attention to grammar, respondents indicated that they were thinking about grammar in 41% of the situations (see Table 2). As can be seen from Table 2, the "lift" situation was slightly more likely than the others to prompt attention to grammar. In contrast, the "token" situation was far less likely to prompt attention to grammar. In twenty-two percent of the situations the subjects did not indicate whether they were paying attention to grammar.

Regarding attention to pronunciation, in far fewer situations, only 22%, did respondents indicate thinking about pronunciation in the production of their utterances, while in 66% of the situations that they did not (and no indication in 12% of the situations) (see Table 3). Whereas for the most part the respondents paid no attention to pronunciation, there were exceptions. For example, in the "book" situation, Sharon noted that she was aware of her problem of confusing /z/ with /th/. In the "music" situation, Sharon was aware that "ask" came out as /athk/, and Shalom was aware of his Israeli /r/. In the "lift"

situation, Lillian, the native Portuguese speaker, reported that at the end of the situation she felt that she was not speaking naturally (e.g., the /owel/ sound in "I'll be waiting" made her uncomfortable). Hagar said that she tried to pronounce properly because of the higher status of the interlocutor. She added, "When I find the appropriate thing to say, my pronunciation is better."

In the "token" situation, Shlomit said that she used "excuse me" because it was easier to pronounce than "sorry" as an opener to get the attention of their friend. Hava reported that she felt more confident with this situation than with the preceding one, the "lift." As she put it, "Because I was more confident here, so I was more fluent. When I am fluent, it goes smoothly. When not, I get stuck on vowels and consonants and start to worry about how to pronounce them." In the "token" situation, however, she had the feeling of having what she termed "over-higui" 'over-pronunciation'--too much attention to pronouncing the word "token," in that the friend responded, "What?" the first time she asked, so she asked more decidedly a second time.<sup>5</sup>

##### 5. The reactive effects of the research method

One aspect of this current approach called for providing the respondents with a description of the situation in the target language. Hence, the respondents could then make use of this vocabulary, even in situations where they did not have mastery over these language forms in their productive knowledge. This

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<sup>5</sup> In both the "lift" and the "token" situations, the interlocutor purposely pretended not to hear the request the first time around in order to prompt a second, and perhaps more careful request.

marks a departure from, say, the semi-direct, simulated oral proficiency interview (SOPI) devised by the Center for Applied Linguistics, whereby the instructions are presented in the language of the respondents and the response is to be in the target language. Thus, if the respondents do not know the vocabulary item in the target language (e.g., the word for "house slippers" in Portuguese on the Portuguese Semi-Direct Test; Stansfield et al. 1990), they are stuck.

From time to time respondents did lift language forms out of the text which described the situation--language forms that were only partially or not at all in their productive knowledge. For example, in the "lift" situation, Hava noted that she lifted "my bus has just left" out of the text. Also, whereas she would simply say "token," she requested a "phone token" in the "token" situation because that was written in the text. Wassim also indicated taking the expression "phone token" from the text. In that same situation, Yaakov said he had used the word "urgent" because the word appeared in the description of the situation--that he would not have used it otherwise. Likewise, Shlomit said she also used "urgent" because "it was included in the situation." Finally, there was an instance of the respondent's combining his own material with that contained in the text. So, in the "lift" situation, Yaakov described how he arrived at asking Debbie, "Can I come by your car?":

First I thought "with your car, with you" and that I would not mention the car because I didn't know how to indicate *hamixonit shelax* 'your car.' I worried that she would think I wanted to go for a ride with her. "To get

a ride with you" would be an expression I wouldn't know how to use. "Can I come" are words that I know how to use. After I heard Debbie read "by car," I said "by your car."

Notwithstanding the above data, there were many more instances in which respondents did not make use of the cues provided in the prompt. In fact, some were oblivious, being caught up too much in their own words to use the vocabulary of the interlocutor or of the prompt as an aid to production. For example, as mentioned above, Galit commented, "I was more into my own words than into listening to Debbie's," with regard to not using 'turn down' in the "music" situation.

### Discussion

The study found that in executing speech acts, the respondents planned out the specifics of their utterances in only a third of the situations, often thought in two languages and sometimes in three languages when planning and executing speech act utterances, used a series of different strategies in searching for language forms, and did not attend much to grammar nor to pronunciation. While the intention of the paper was to describe the production processes of the group as a whole, there were subjects whose speech production styles could be characterized into general types, if only crudely. Four such styles which seemed to emerge were those of the "metacognizer," "the thinker," "the avoider," and "the pragmatist."

### Emergent Speech Production Styles

One style, that of the ~~metacognizers~~, was characteristic of those individuals who seemed to have a highly developed metacognitive awareness and who used this awareness to the fullest. Hagar, for instance, reported being aware that she was not only speaking in EFL but also having to perform difficult speech behaviors at the same time. While she was aware that she was purposely not monitoring her grammar, she did report monitoring her pronunciation in order to speak properly to her higher-status professor in the "lift" situation. When unsure of how to say something, she would use the strategy of partial delivery of the thought, such as in the "notes" situation, where she wanted to express full anger but settled for sarcasm instead.

A second style was that of thinkers, i.e., individuals whose thoughts included a voice in the back of the head which kept informing them of their general deficiencies, kept them monitoring their language output, and continued to remind them of their possible or actual production errors from prior utterances.<sup>6</sup> Ricki, for example, alluded to her difficulties in trying to retrieve English vocabulary after not speaking it for a long time. That she would have these problems is not in itself noteworthy, but her calling attention to it brings up the issue of the din-in-the-head phenomenon mentioned above. Ricki was one of those who has spent time in English-speaking environments where the din in the head was intensified (a month in England four years prior to the study and three months in the U.S. one year prior to the study). Perhaps a voice in the back of her head was reminding her that she was not rehearsed enough in her

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<sup>6</sup>Perhaps this style could be viewed as a subcategory of metacognizers.

English to have the words appear effortlessly. Ricki was also a frequent monitor user ("I am always thinking about grammar...When I have problems like 'not/don't' I correct them."), which would be consistent with the "thinker" style.

In addition, Ricki indicated various afterthoughts that she had had after producing utterances. One such afterthought was about having said "very sorry" in the "meeting" situation but then thinking to herself that she could have said "terribly sorry." Another such afterthought was that "stopped" was not the correct word in the "meeting" situation ("...I met some friends and they stopped me and I couldn't go on...") and that she should not change it because she "was already in the middle of things." Such lingering thoughts about prior speech production could possibly interfere with the execution of the utterance at hand.

A third speech production style was that of avoider. For example, in the "lift" situation, Shlomit did not know whether it was appropriate to call her teacher by name, so she left it out. When in the "music" situation, she was not sure how to say that her neighbor's music was "too loud," she avoided the adjective altogether by saying, "I can't sleep with your music." Perhaps the behavior most indicative of a systematic avoidance strategy was her conscious avoidance of words that were difficult for her to pronounce. So, for example, in the "token" situation, she reported saying "excuse me" because it was easier for her to pronounce than "sorry."

A fourth style to emerge could perhaps be termed that of the pragmatist, i.e., the individual who got by in oral production



more by means of online adjustments tricks than through metacognitive planning. Rather than simply avoiding material altogether, this pattern involves finding alternative solutions that approximate what is called for. Galit would be a good example of such a subject. Not only did she switch to "I want to drive with you" when she was not sure if she could say "room in the car," but she also refrained from mentioning a "lift" because she was not sure how to use it in a sentence. She was also the subject who in looking for a reason that she needed a ride, let her utterance, "My bus is very late," stand although she knew right away that it was not what she had meant to say. She left the utterance as it was because it was grammatically acceptable and comprehensible. She also was willing to settle for various approximations instead of struggling to find the most appropriate word. So, in the "book" situation she settled for "stuff" when she wanted to say "material." Then, in the "music" situation, she asked for the neighbor to "reduce" the volume when she meant for him to "turn it down." She did not notice that the expression appeared in the prompt itself ("I was more into my own words than into listening to Debbie's.").

#### Issues of Research Methodology

It could be argued that the elicitation of any oral language production would have served the purposes of this study--that there was no need to elicit speech act behavior. Whereas this may be true, the current study chose to investigate thought processes during sociolinguistically complex speech behavior

because such language behavior was considered perhaps more cognitively demanding than other language behavior and thus a richer source of data. Several things made the situations even more demanding. For instance, it was not spelled out for the respondents what stance they were to take in a given situation. In the "notes" situation, for example, Hagar decided that she would get angry and take the stance of not needing any favors from her friend.

It should also be noted that the order of the different speech acts may have had an effect on the since respondents indicated that the apologies, which came first, were the most difficult in that the respondent had caused the infraction. On the other hand, the more perfunctory speech acts, the requests, came at the end when the respondents may have been getting somewhat fatigued by the research procedures.

This lack of specificity in the prompt calls up the issue of just how specific the prompt should be. Just how much context should be provided the respondents? For example, should the prompt give culturally relevant information if the situation is culturally specific? Should it tell them what stance to take (e.g., recalcitrant or conciliatory, assertive or reticent, etc.), what emotion to express (e.g., angry, frustration, sadness, sarcasm, etc.)?

These speech act situations also created a form of time pressure not so prevalent in other forms of elicitation, such as with verbal report of reading and writing processes. The interlocutor purposely pursued each issue until some resolution of the situation took place. This procedure meant that in each

interaction there was invariably an unplanned portion where the respondent had to react on an on-line basis. Such was not the case in the Robinson (1991) study where there was no rejoinder.

The finding that certain situations may be more likely to cause the respondents both to plan their utterance and to produce it directly in the target language, may be of genuine interest to language acquisition researchers. They may wish to choose their situations so as to encourage this form of cognitive behavior. Until now, investigations of speech behavior have not given much attention to the language-of-thought issue with respect to planning of utterances. As a result, elicitation procedures may have unknowingly called for cumbersome mental gymnastic among the respondents, such as in the "lift" situation in this study.

The findings reported in this study are based on a relatively new form of data with regard to role playing situations in that they are by and large process and not product data. The research method of having respondents role play two situations and then view the videotape seemed to produce richer linguistic information than did the method used in the Robinson (1991) study. There were probably several reasons for this. One was that the interactions were more naturalistic in that they were oral and not written. Second, the retrospective verbal reports were conducted in the respondents native or near-native language. Third, videotape was used to jog the respondents' memory as to the choices made in selecting material for their utterances.

It could be noted that asking subjects after speech act situations whether they were aware of their pronunciation or

grammar would have reactive effects on the subsequent speech act situations. Although the situation that prompted the most attention to grammar (eight respondents) as well as the highest level of attention to pronunciation (five respondents) came in the third set of speech acts, it was also a situation involving style shifting (requesting a lift from a higher-status teacher). Thus, it is difficult to say whether the results reflect incrementally more attention to grammar and pronunciation or are an artifact of the situation.

Fortunately, as more work is done in the elicitation of speech act behavior, more attention is also being given to describing possible research methods and to enumerating their strengths and weaknesses (Kasper & Dahl 1991; Cohen & Olshtain, forthcoming). Unquestionably this is an area in which further development of instrumentation is called for.

### Pedagogical Implications

There are several pedagogical implications that can be drawn from this study, however tentative they may be. First, learners may have a more difficult time in producing complex speech forms such as speech acts than teachers are aware. The end product--the learner's utterance--may have been the result of extensive mental gymnastics involving thought processes in two or more languages and repeated internal debate as to which lexical word or phrase to choose. To merely assess the product may be doing the learner a disservice. Teachers may wish to devise a means for finding out more about the processes involved in producing the resulting utterances. Just as teachers ask learners about the strategies they used to arrive at answers to a cloze test,

they may wish to ask them how they produced utterances in a speaking exercise--e.g., by viewing a videotape after the task is completed, as in the current study.

Second, some learners may not be adequately aware of what is involved in complex speech behavior. These learners may benefit from a discussion of what compensatory strategies<sup>7</sup> are so that they can better understand the strategies that they use and be more systematic in their use of such strategies. For example, there are students who are stopped in their production of utterances each time they cannot come up with the word or phrase they want. Such students may turn to a dictionary, with sometimes dubious results. Lexical avoidance, simplification, or approximation strategies do not necessarily come naturally to such learners, and so formal discussions could be beneficial.

Finally, teachers need to be aware that not all speaking tasks are created equal--that there are tasks which make far greater demands on learners than do others. In this study, the seemingly simple task of requesting a lift home from the teacher was the task which called for the most mental logistics in terms of thought patterns, monitoring for grammar, and pronunciation, and so forth. Teachers may wish to consider the language processing demands which are likely to be made by a given classroom exercise or test task because the level of demands may help to explain the learner's success at completing the task.

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<sup>7</sup>There is a somewhat pejorative ring to the term *compensatory*, suggesting something remedial. A more positive term might be that of *complementary strategies*, which suggests strategies that are meant to complement other existing means of communication.

Table 1

*Planning of Speech Act Production*

	Assessment	Planning	No Assessment or Planning
SITUATIONS			
meeting	7	4	4
book	9	3	3
music	7	3	5
notes	8	3	4
lift	6	9	0
token	7	5	3
Total	44 (49%)	27 (30%)	19 (21%)

Table 2

*Attention to Grammar in Speech Act Production*

	YES	NO	DON'T SAY
SITUATIONS			
meeting	7	6	2
book	7	6	2
music	6	6	3
notes	6	6	3
lift	8	4	3
token	3	5	7
Total	37 (41%)	33 (37%)	20 (22%)

Table 3

*Attention to Pronunciation in Speech Act Production*

	YES	NO	DON'T SAY
SITUATIONS			



meeting	2	13	0
book	2	13	0
music	5	9	1
notes	3	9	3
lift	5	8	2
token	3	7	5
Total	20 (22%)	59 (66%)	11 (12%)

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## APPENDIX A

Background Questionnaire

1. Field of study and level \_\_\_\_\_
2. Birthplace and date of birth \_\_\_\_\_
3. Native language \_\_\_\_\_ Father's native language \_\_\_\_\_  
Mother's native language \_\_\_\_\_
4. Self-evaluation of proficiency in English as compared to natives:  
  

speaking:	excellent	___	very good	___	fair	___	poor	___
listening:	excellent	___	very good	___	fair	___	poor	___
reading:	excellent	___	very good	___	fair	___	poor	___
writing:	excellent	___	very good	___	fair	___	poor	___
5. Period of time in an English-speaking country:  
  

Name of country/countries	_____	mos.	___	years	___
	_____	mos.	___	years	___
6. Use of English in the past and currently:
  - a. use for speaking English with English speakers.
  - b. reading in English: magazines, literature, academic texts.
  - c. watching films in English without translation.

In the past: frequently \_\_\_ sometimes \_\_\_ rarely \_\_\_  
                   frequently \_\_\_ sometimes \_\_\_ rarely \_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

Responses in English to Different Role-Play SituationsINSTRUCTIONS:

You are asked to participate in six role-play situations. The situations will be presented to you two at a time. Try to respond as you would in a real situation. The situations will be explained to you in English by Debbie and call for role playing with her. Before you respond to each situation, you will be given a minute to think out your response. Pay attention to all aspects of each situation.

It is important that you understand the situation fully. If there is something in it you do not understand, ask us and we will explain it to you in English or in Hebrew.

The response to each situation will be videotaped. Then you will be shown the videotape and will be asked a series of questions by



Yafa regarding your response to the situation, in order to understand how you arrived at your response in the given situation.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our study!

### SITUATIONS:

(Note: This is the initial stimulus and then the situations are played out to completion.)

1. You arranged to meet a friend in order to study together for an exam. You arrive half an hour late for the meeting.

Friend (annoyed): I've been waiting at least half an hour for you!

You: \_\_\_\_\_

2. You promised to return a textbook to your classmate within a day or two, after xeroxing a chapter. You held onto it for almost two weeks.

Classmate: I'm really upset about the book because I needed it to prepare for last week's class.

You: \_\_\_\_\_

3. This is not the first time that your neighbor has played loud music late at night, and you have to get up early the next morning. You phone her to complain:

Neighbor: Hello.

You: \_\_\_\_\_

4. A friend who studies with you at the university refuses to share important notes she got hold of before the final exam. You are quite upset because you've often helped her in the past.

Friend: No, I can't give you these notes. I need them!

You: \_\_\_\_\_

5. An evening class has just ended. Your bus has just left and the next one will not be along for another hour. Your teacher lives in the same neighborhood and has come by car. You'd like to get a ride with her, so you approach her after the class.

You: \_\_\_\_\_

6. You have to make an urgent phone call. You ask your friend for a phone token.

You: \_\_\_\_\_

### Transcript of Interactions between a Respondent, Nogah, and the Interlocutor

#### Situation 1 - Meeting

D: I've been waiting at least half an hour for you!

S8: So what! It's only an--a meeting for--to study.

D: Well. I mean--I was standing here waiting. I could've been

sitting in the library studying.

S8: But you're in your house. You can--you can study if you wish. You can do whatever you want.

D: Still pretty annoying--I mean--try and come on time next time.

S8: OK, but don't make such a big deal of it.

D: OK.

#### Situation 2 - Book

D: I'm really upset about the book, because I needed it to prepare for last week's class.

S8: I really feel sorry. It's too bad that you haven't told me before. I forgot. I don't know what's to--what--I don't have what to say--you're right in whatever you--you say.

D: Well, you know--I'll have to really think about it next time if I lend you a book again because --you know, I needed it and--

S8: You're right. You're totally right.

D: OK.

#### Situation 3 - Music

D: Hello.

S8: This is your neighbor from the--top floor.

D: Yeah.

S8: I'm sorry to talk with you in this hour of the night but--I really want to go to sleep and I can't because of the music.

D: Oh, my music. Is it too loud?

S8: Yeah.

D: Oh, sorry.

S8: Usually it doesn't disturb me but--I really have to wake up early.

D: Oh, fine. I didn't realize that it--bothered you. I'll turn it down. Sorry, bye.

S8: Thank you.

#### Situation 4 - Notes

D: No, I can't give you these notes. I need them!

S8: I need them too. When you need things I al--I give you.

D: Yeah, I know, but I--this is different. This is really urgent and I have to go home and study right now, and I--I can't--give them to you. Sorry.

S8: I only want to xerox them but it's if it is such--such a disturb for you--so--OK, I will manage without it.

D: OK, sorry. I mean--Look, normally I would, but I just can't this time. Sorry.

S8: OK.

#### Situation 5 - Lift

S8: Excuse me, are you going to Baka?

D: Yes, I am.

S8: Really? Can I have a ride with you?

D: Yeah. Sure. Um--listen, I have to meet someone downstairs--

- um--I'll be leaving in about five minutes. OK?
- S8: Fine, if it is OK with you. I will--I would love to.
- D: Great--OK. I'll see you there.
- S8: Thank you.
- D: You're welcome.

#### Situation 6 - Token

- S8: Hey, do you have a--a token?
- D: Sorry, so--excuse me?
- S8: Do you have one token for me?
- D: A token? What--what token?
- S8: For--to make a telephone call.
- D: Oh, yeah. Here you are.
- S8: Oh, thank you.
- D: That's OK.
- S8: I really need it.
- D: Good, OK, no problem.

### APPENDIX C

#### RETROSPECTIVE VERBAL REPORT INTERVIEW

(These questions are asked 3 times--after each set of two situations. The interviewer uses these questions as a starter and then adds probes according to the role-play data on videotape and according to the responses of the informants.)

Now let us look at your response together.

Why did you choose those elements in your response?

1. The source for vocabulary and phrases
  - a. material learned in courses--which? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. material acquired, as from reading literature or newspapers, from conversations, from classroom exercises, etc. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Did you have a number of alternatives? Why did you choose that response? \_\_\_\_\_

How did you choose your response?

1. Content
  - a. How did you select the vocabulary? (Interviewer: note intensifiers in the responses, for example) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Did you think out your response in Hebrew or in English? (partially or fully) In your opinion, did you try to respond as an English speaker or as a Hebrew speaker? Please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

- c. Were you thinking about grammar while you were producing your response? \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Did you think about pronunciation while you were responding? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Did you think out your entire response before offering it, or did you start responding and think out the rest of your response as you went along?
- \_\_\_\_\_